

# How to evaluate a project



## Overview

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## Summary

Through well planned evaluation at local and national levels, stakeholders in neighbourhood schemes and projects can find out both how they are getting on during the programme (formative or developmental evaluation) and whether they are achieving long term outcomes (impact or summative evaluation). This overview describes

- Why evaluation matters
- Key elements in evaluation, including establishing a baseline and choosing indicators
- What evaluation might cover, including impact on key themes (crime, education and so on), ways of working, overall effectiveness, resident satisfaction and sustainability.

Under the heading of How to track progress you will find toolkits on

- How to plan and manage an evaluation exercise
- How to involve the community in evaluation
- How to carry out action research

There is relevant information too, about how to collect and use information about your neighbourhood in the How to define the problem section.

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<p><i>Monitoring and evaluation both make demands on the time and energy of those running neighbourhood programmes</i></p>	<h3>What's the Problem?</h3> <p>Like monitoring (recording progress as projects or schemes move along) evaluation (looking at longer-term outcomes) makes demands on the time and energy of those running neighbourhood programmes. The problem – as evidenced by findings from evaluations of the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programme and of other area-based initiatives – is finding the right balance between the necessary short-term monitoring of activities, spending and outputs as programmes proceed, and the long term evaluation of what works. At the local level the demands from government for regular monitoring information have distracted those delivering projects from gathering information about why some things work and others do not. National evaluations have made heavy demands on local programmes. Evaluations of individual initiatives – SRB, Sure Start, Employment Zones, Education Action Zones for example – have paid little attention to their impact on neighbourhoods.</p>
<p><i>We need to establish a culture of evaluation locally – so that everyone concerned recognises its value</i></p>	<h3>What are the causes?</h3> <p>The challenge is to build a culture of evaluation within which all stakeholders use evidence of what works well and systematically collect information about local schemes and projects. This will help them develop their projects further as the years go by and also provide new evidence about how things work and about the local circumstances which make some things work better in some places than others.</p> <p>Evaluation is often done late in the day. People do not start thinking about it until towards the end of a project's life. Although baselining is now more common, it is still the case that many schemes and projects do not have baselines against which to record progress or outcomes. Outputs and outcomes are poorly specified. There is little examination of causal factors -why some things work and others do not.</p>
<p><i>Evaluation is now a central feature of government programme review.</i></p>	<h3>What's been tried?</h3> <p>There is an enormous range of experience of evaluations, ranging from multi-year national <i>programme</i> evaluations to local assessments of individual projects. But there are some common themes and issues which apply to all types of evaluation.</p>

<p><i>The scheme or project's objectives are the starting point for evaluation ... which also depends on information about existing conditions and clarity about planned activities and expected results.</i></p>	<p><b>Key elements in evaluation</b></p> <p>There are a number of key concepts with which everyone doing evaluation should become familiar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseline - the starting point of existing conditions which renewal and regeneration aims to alter and against which all subsequent activities and achievements must be assessed.</li> <li>• Objectives and targets - the aspirations and objectives for renewal set out in the original scheme bid and developed in the Delivery Plan, the improvements which the scheme/project is intended to bring about.</li> <li>• Outputs - the direct results of activity reflecting the application of resources. Examples would be jobs created, organisations assisted, new business start-ups, dwellings improved. Guidance identifies a number of outputs against which schemes are to be measured.</li> <li>• Indicators - the set of quantitative and qualitative indicators which are used to measure progress and achievement against the initial objectives and targets of a scheme.</li> <li>• Outcomes - are the longer term changes in socio-economic or physical conditions which are due to the scheme and which improve the quality of life of residents in the area or of firms which operate in the area.</li> </ul> <p>Evaluation is now a central feature of government programme review. Treasury guidance informs most of the national evaluation programmes, with an emphasis on value for money and additionality (how much extra does public money buy that would not otherwise have happened). But more recent evaluations – of Health Action Zones (HAZ) and the New Deal for Communities (NDC) – have begun to ask questions not just about what happens but why it happens. There is recognition now of the differing approaches to evaluation.</p> <p>Advice on evaluation of SRB regeneration was set out in a DETR guidance note on Local Evaluation in 1997. Much of this remains relevant to neighbourhood renewal. Local Evaluation suggests four main purposes for evaluating a local regeneration programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To assess its impact on the problems the programme is seeking to address, or the conditions it is seeking to change;</li> </ul>
<p><i>The purposes of evaluation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To report back accurately to partners, residents of the scheme area and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit/Government Office for the Region/ Regional Development Agency.</li> <li>• To suggest ways of managing the programme more effectively;</li> </ul>

<p><i>NDC and evaluation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify ways of improving the performance of this and other programmes.</li> </ul> <p>Each New Deal for Communities (NDC) partnership in its Delivery Plan sets out broad proposals for evaluation, and presents a comprehensive baseline position which can be used in evaluation. Each partnership must carry out Annual Reviews and carry out "critical evaluations" at the end of years three and six and at the end of the scheme. The minimum requirement is to measure the change against the baseline indicators, the achievement of key milestones, progress towards key outcomes at interim stages and the achievement of outcomes at the final evaluation. There is no specific guidance for local evaluation of NDC schemes, however.</p> <p>The overall purpose of evaluation within these renewal and regeneration programmes is to investigate and report on achievements, impacts and outcomes of schemes in the local context. Evaluation involves asking questions about what has happened (summative evaluation), and why and how it has happened in the way it has (process evaluation). Evaluation should provide lessons for the partnership as it moves forward; interim evaluations often take the form of a 'formative' or learning evaluation.</p> <p>There are a number of topics which any comprehensive evaluation should cover:</p>
<p><i>What evaluation should cover</i></p>	<p><b>Substantive themes</b></p> <p>The themes to which the project/scheme relates – worklessness, health, crime reduction, housing and environment, education, poverty and so on. Evaluation needs to look at what has been achieved in terms of real improvements in these theme areas.</p> <p><b>The processes of partnership</b></p> <p>Partnership and the Partners - new ways of working in partnership are central to most regeneration initiatives, and evaluation should focus on the ways in which partnership working has influenced and in turn been influenced by the activities of regeneration. Community involvement - empowering communities is the long term objective in many schemes and much effort has gone towards community capacity building. Evaluation must therefore focus on how far there has been real benefit to such capacity building.</p> <p><b>Effectiveness</b></p> <p>Targeting - schemes will have direct beneficiaries - groups of place or interest. The scheme as a whole should have an impact on the whole of the target area - improving the quality of life within it. However</p>

	<p>certain aspects of the scheme will be targeted at specific groups. SRB project appraisal explicitly includes minority ethnic groups but schemes may also target faith groups, people with disabilities, people of differing age groups, people with specific family or social problems. It is appropriate, therefore, to evaluate the impact of the scheme on these specifically targeted groups.</p> <p>Value for Money - places the emphasis on adding value to projects or schemes rather than simply shifting resources around and displacing effort from one activity to another. Focusing on economy, efficiency and effectiveness it is assessed to ensure public accountability and the effective use of resources.</p> <p><b>Perceptions of benefit</b></p> <p>Resident satisfaction - the ultimate beneficiaries of regeneration must be the residents of the area and evaluation must therefore attempt to capture - probably through local surveys - the extent to which resident satisfaction within an area has changed.</p> <p>Image - confidence in an area - the willingness of residents to remain, or of business to invest - is key to turning round estates with a bad name, and to ensuring that the stigma which often accompanies disadvantage is removed.</p> <p>Beneficiaries - how do those who are intended to benefit from projects actually experience changes. Do projects correctly target? Do users have improved services?</p> <p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <p>Lasting regeneration is the key aim of government supported schemes. The evidence is that initiatives in the past have had only limited and relatively short-term effects, and the need to establish sustainable communities is of paramount performance</p>
	<p><b>Checklist</b></p> <p>Evaluation should not be a distraction from delivery – or an afterthought. Knowing what you are achieving is central to making a real impact. Partnerships therefore need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think about evaluation from an early stage. You cannot evaluate how things have changed and why, if you don't have a clear picture of the starting point (the baseline) and of what you are trying to do</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a 'culture' of evaluation – get the commitment of everyone involved, from projects to partnership board, to gathering information and <i>using</i> it</li> <li>• Decide what local work is needed to manage a scheme effectively and understand its impact. How and when will individual projects be evaluated? What about the scheme as a whole?</li> <li>• Ensure evaluation covers the key themes a scheme or project is targeting - and that it also looks at how things are being done, overall effectiveness and sustainability</li> <li>• Make links between monitoring and evaluation. Competing demands for information can create difficulties, so it is helpful to think about evaluation, as well as more routine monitoring, when you are setting targets and agreeing outputs and indicators</li> <li>• Involve the local community. Properly done, evaluation can be an important part of accountability to local people, ensuring local voices are heard and providing vital information to feed back to local people. (There will be a toolkit on how to involve the community in evaluation)</li> <li>• Use evaluation to shape work in progress and to inform forward strategies and other local developments.</li> </ul> <p>All of this needs careful planning - you will find more on this in How to plan and manage an evaluation</p>
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**Want to know more**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Telephone number</b>	<b>Email address</b>
	<b>References</b>		
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### **Training**

University of the West of England Distance Learning Training in Evaluation: <http://www.uwe.ac.uk/fbe/cities>

or e-mail [distance.detr@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:distance.detr@uwe.ac.uk)